

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Much research (Lukmani, 1972; Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000; Ransirini, 2006; Salem, 2006) has indicated that learners' motivation and gender are the two controlling factors that influence second language proficiency. Harmer (2001) defines motivation as an internal force that drives someone to do things. It may seem simply defined but motivation is often being ranked as the highest factor by academics when they are asked what makes learning meaningful.

According to Lightbown and Spada (1993), the concept of motivation has evolved significantly over the years that to pinpoint to one single definition for it, is not that easy. It is indeed not a surprising notion considering the concept of motivation is often linked with interest, curiosity and behaviour. Motivation is complex and it is indeed 'an umbrella-term involving a wide range of different factors' (Dörnyei, 2001: 9).

Dörnyei observes that motivation is when people:

“ do something if they expect success and they value the outcome (expectancy – value theory), the goal gives meaning, direction and purpose to a particular action (goal theory), people are also generally motivated to behave in ways that put them in a better light (self – worth theory), the lack of confidence in carrying a certain task will likely make us avoid the task (self – efficacy theory), our past actions and the way we interpret our past success and failures, determine our current and future behaviour (attribution theory). We will be more motivated to do something out of our own will than something that we are forced to do (self – determination theory) and our personal likes and dislikes i.e. attitudes – also play an important role in deciding what we will do and what we won't (theory of planned behaviour)” (2001:12).

This notion is further strengthened by Williams and Burden (1997:111) who state that the concept of motivation is composed of many different and overlapping factors, such as 'interest, curiosity or a desire to achieve.' In addition, Oxford, Park-Oh, Ito and Sumrall (1993) assert that in second language learning, motivation is always considered the most important factor to achieve success.

Rivers (1990) views motivation in two strands – hedonistic and ego involvement. The hedonistic strand includes the various theories of reinforcement and self-reward while the ego-involvement strand involves the individual's self-image and level of aspiration. On the other hand, Gardner and Lambert (1972, as cited in Nakanishi, 2002) categorised motivation into two aspects: integrative and instrumental, whereas, according to Deci and Ryan (1985), motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic.

Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to integrate successfully into the target language community. When a learner becomes a resident in a new community that uses the target language for social interactions, integrative motivation is the key component in assisting the learner to develop some level of proficiency in the language. Meanwhile, instrumental motivation refers to the learner's desire to learn a language for utilitarian purposes such as employment or travel. This is generally characterised by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Hudson, 2000, as cited in Norris–Holt, 2001).

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is motivation that comes within a learner. The learner is purely interested in the learning experience without expecting any apparent

external reward. Learners with intrinsic motivation are fully engaged in the learning and perceive it as something pleasurable and satisfying. Extrinsically motivated learners are those who learn for the sake of achieving a reward or avoiding a punishment. Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades and even certain types of positive feedback. Extrinsically motivated learners also often initiate or perform a task in order to avoid being punished (Deci, 1972).

In the expectancy-value theory, Vroom (1964 as cited in Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) states that motivation to learn a second or a foreign language is determined by components such as effort, valence, expectancy, ability and instrumentality. Vroom (1964, as cited in Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) suggests that the effort exerted by an individual in learning is influenced by the perception of degree of attractiveness of the goals (valence), the perception of the probability of attaining the goals (expectancy), the appraisal of their ability to achieve the goals (ability) and the connection of success and reward (instrumentality). From the expectancy value theory, Wen (1997) developed the 'Motivation Scale', a tool to measure the level of these components of motivation in Asian-American students learning Chinese. In 2000, Shaaban and Ghaith adapted the Motivation Scale to determine the level of the six components of motivation in Arab students in learning English.

Based on the Gardner and Lambert's (1972) conception of integrative and instrumental motivation as well as the expectancy value theories developed by Vroom (1964) and expanded by Wen (1997), the present study aims to investigate the level of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability shown by learners of English as a second language.

1.1.1. English as a Second Language (ESL) in Malaysia

From 1957 to 1967 English fulfilled the role of official language and both English and Malay enjoyed equal status in all domains in the country. In 1956, a committee was set up by Tun Abdul Razak, the then Minister of Education, to re-evaluate the education system. As a result, the Razak Report (1956) was established. The report recommended that the existing bilingualism in primary schools remain, and all schools, irrespective of language medium, use a common curriculum content (Abdullah, 2004). The government took measures to introduce a common syllabus in schools and a common language as the medium of instruction in order to encourage unity and racial harmony in a multi-cultural society (The Razak Report, 1956, as cited in Gaudart, 1987). As Asmah states, 'unification brings about integration of a sociocultural and political nature. That is why nationalists utilize language use and language planning' (1982:30). The Razak Report (1956, as cited in Gaudart, 1987) recommended the use of Malay and English be compulsory in all schools. Malay was to be used to foster unity so the people could share a national identity. At the same time, the government saw the need for students to acquire English, as they would benefit greatly in economic and professional fields. The general objective of English language teaching was for the purpose of knowledge and science (Asmah, 1982).

With the aim of establishing a united front among the population, the Malay language was named the national language. A pass in Malay and English is crucial in government examinations for all schools. Bahasa Melayu became a compulsory subject for all students and students' achievement in acquiring the language would be reflected in their national school examination certificates.

Failing to see an improvement in national unity among the three main ethnic groups from the language policy in the school systems, the government took measures to phase out national-type schools by turning them to national schools, which meant only the Malay language would be used as the medium of instruction.

After the race riot in 1969, there was a pressing need for the government to adopt a national language to unite people. Therefore, Bahasa Melayu was then re-named to Bahasa Malaysia in the hope that it would mirror a more nationalistic image. By 1970 all primary schools were using Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction. Bahasa Malaysia was made the official language while English was accorded as a second language. English was rejected to be the common official language. The issue was beyond debate when the Constitution Act was amended in 1971 to prohibit the questioning of any provisions concerning the status of Malay as the national language in Article 152. Article 152 also specified that English would be the second language of the country (David, 2007).

The status of English, which changed from the medium of instruction to a subject in the school curriculum, remains until today. When English was the medium of instruction, the syllabuses were more structural and grammar based with wide context and scope. This was important as English was the language of intellectual pursuits and official communication. However, with the change in status to a second language, the focus of the syllabuses shifted to structures and functions required in second language situations with the context being more Malaysian-biased (Asiah, 1994). Asmah explains:

“ ...the oral and the writing skills which are equally important in the mastery of a language, should be emphasized but within a syllabus limited by time and schedule and other factors, it is not possible to teach the language for equal

proficiency in all the skills concerned. Thus, the unfortunate outcome of English language teaching conducted for students of national schools in Malaysia is a well-known fact ” (1982:47).

Nowadays, in lower and upper secondary schools, English is taught as a subject for 200 minutes per week (Development of Education, 2001). According to Asiah, ‘the biggest problem faced by English (language learning) now is motivation...several intrinsic and extrinsic motivational techniques are being tried to alleviate this problem. It seems to be a persistent problem that requires constant attention and careful strategising to overcome it’ (1994:61). As English is now the second language, many students at the secondary level have no motivation to learn it as they feel that they can get by using Malay in their daily communication, without realising that English is important when they continue their education to tertiary level.

In the 1990s, many foreign colleges and universities were set up in Malaysia. With many foreign staff and many more courses being introduced, the government allowed various subjects to be taught in English. Furthermore, realising how important English is with globalisation and in the area of technology, in 2003, the government took measures to introduce English as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics subjects in all schools (Ong and Tan, 2008). While this was a noble decision, many teachers claimed they were not properly trained to teach the subjects in English and students struggled to learn the subjects in English (The Star, 2006, as cited in Ong and Tan, 2008).

With 200 minutes per week of English in schools and two technical subjects being taught in English, many students struggle to deal with their English textbooks and lectures when they begin tertiary education.

From the discussion above, it is clear that English has gone through a major transformation from being the official language of the country and the medium of instruction in schools to what it is now, a language that is only taught for a few hours weekly in schools. Acquiring English can be quite challenging for the students. Nevertheless, they try their hardest to acquire the language so they are able to pass their secondary school exams and move on to university.

The key question is: how do they maintain their motivation? As this study aims to determine the level of motivation students at tertiary level demonstrate based on the Motivation Scale (developed by Wen, 1997 and adapted by Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) in learning English as a second language, it is therefore, important to know some of the factors that affect motivation in the ESL classrooms. These factors will be discussed in the next section.

1.1.2. Factors that affect motivation in the ESL classroom

Learners are often reminded that the language classroom is a venue for teaching and learning. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, more often than not, what takes place in a classroom, especially in a language classroom, go beyond teaching and learning. A language classroom is often a place where learners have to take on a different personality and immerse in the culture of the target language in order to learn the

language. Dörnyei (2001:14) states, ‘teaching a language can be seen as imposing elements of another culture into the students’ own ‘life space.’ Therefore, it is not wrong to say that a language classroom is not just a venue where teaching and learning take place, it is also a venue where a mixture of emotions and abilities come together and these different emotions and abilities may influence learners’ motivation.

Weiner (1984) and Stipek (1996) (as cited in Dörnyei, 2001:13), explain:

“classrooms are rather intricate microcosms where students spend a great deal of their life. Besides being the venue where students acquire skills and learn about the world, classrooms are also where they make friends, fall in love, rebel against previous generation, find out who they are and what the purpose of life is ... in short, where they grow up. So much is going on at the same time that no single motivational principle can possibly capture this complexity.”

Brown further echoes this notion by stating that, ‘second language learning is an emotional activity involving countless affective variables, or to assert that learning a second language involves taking on a new identity.’ (1987:116)

Williams and Burden (1997) sum up that there are two crucial factors that affect motivation in language learning which are internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic). Among the internal factors are interest, personal relevance, value of outcomes, mastery, attitude and gender. Some of the external factors are the support from people around the learners (significant others), the learning environment and the expectations of the society. Williams and Burden (1997) assert that in order to relate these factors to language learning, teachers must play an active part in stimulating learners’ interests and curiosity by making each task personal and achievable, encouraging learners’ self-confidence and at the same time, making learners feel that they are accelerating to the

next level. In addition, teachers are also responsible in portraying a good image and having positive attitudes towards the country and the culture of the target language.

The internal factors above, ideally, should interlock with the external factors (extrinsic). Only then can an optimum learning environment be achieved and that in return, will encourage second language learning. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors help generate learners' motivation, increase learners' goal-orientedness and make learning relevant.

1.1.3. Role of gender in the ESL classroom

As mentioned by Williams and Burden (1997), gender is one of the contributing factors that influences motivation. To date, many studies have documented the role of gender in second language learning and the influence it has on motivation (Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000; Kang, 2000; Rahman, 2005; Salem, 2006). Many, including teachers, believe that females are better at language learning (Sunderland, 2000).

According to Northrop (2003), more females take English or foreign language courses compared to males. Males have been said to invest less in language education if they are not able to see the purpose of learning the language after they graduate from university (Norton and Pavlenko, 2004). Similarly, Bryne (1998, as cited in Fewings, 2010) opines that females put in more effort than males. Males have been shown to put in less effort in activities where they are not certain of success. However, males tend to exert effort if they know they need the language for work or to communicate with the target language community. Thus, male learners' source of motivation is often said to be extrinsically –

oriented. Rúa (2006:100) further echoes this view by stating that, ‘girls consistently appear more interested in the study of a foreign language than boys, and manifest an evident liking for the culture, the country and the speaker of that language. Boys’ reasons for studying the language are mainly instrumental, whereas girls’ motivations tend to be integrative.’

Sunderland (2000) states that in language education, girls are taught to be good readers and writers, and most teachers and the girls themselves see this as an easy option for them, career-wise. This notion is further strengthened by Rúa that states, ‘sex-stereotyping of jobs in society still endorses language learning as an accomplishment for girls. Consequently, girls tend to perceive languages as more vocationally relevant. In other words, they are generally more inclined to believe that languages will be useful to them in their future careers’ (2006:100). Cameron (2007) illustrates the sex-stereotyping of jobs in society by giving an example of a call centre in Northern England where most of the employees are women. Despite the numerous applications the centre has received from both females and males, the manager of the call centre was more inclined to employ women. The manager stated that women were chosen for the job simply because they are women, and not necessarily because they had made an impression at the interview. The reason for this is due to the fact that the manager believed that females were just better at talking and building a rapport. Kramarae (1981) justifies this notion by stating that females prefer to relate to people and they specialise in expressive or social activities.

Further discussion on gender and motivation in language learning will be taken up in Chapter Two.

1.2. Statement of the problem

The present study aims to look into the motivation level of university students in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to learn ESL and into factors that influence their motivation. More specifically, it aims to investigate university students' degree of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability in learning English as a second language.

Despite having spent many years in school learning English as a second language, many university students still struggle in university with their courses despite some of them receiving good grades in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). Often students feel that a good result in the English paper in SPM does not guarantee success or prepare them for the language challenge they face at tertiary level. Asmah states, 'passing the English paper at the SPM level does not necessarily mean that one has acquired the ability to function actively in the language' (1982:107). As stated earlier, the lack of motivation in English language learning is a problem faced by many students in Malaysia (Asiah, 1994), as they feel that they can get by easily using Malay. Students will only realise the importance of English once they start their tertiary education.

As the medium of instruction in private tertiary education is English and not Bahasa Malaysia as in secondary education, most students find the transition rather challenging. They also find it difficult to cope with their assignments and presentations, which are to be done in English. Nevertheless, students take up these challenges and try hard to cope as passing their courses is of the utmost importance to them (Covington and Müeller, 2001). It can be concluded then, that, this is what motivates them to learn English. Thus, it is interesting to examine how motivated university students are in learning

English, and how much effort they exerted in learning the language. It is also interesting to examine the factors that make them motivated to learn.

In addition, the study also aims to look at the degree of motivation according to gender, as gender has been identified as one of the contributing factors that influences learning and motivation.

Since females and males learn differently (Burman, 2007), this study will also investigate how their motivation differs. Females and males perceive things differently, not just due to biological factors like girls develop faster neurologically (Burman, 2007), but also due to the stereotyping made by the society. For generations, society was made to believe that males make good businessmen, surgeons and engineers while females make good stay-at-home mothers, teachers or nurses. This stereotyping of careers is also adopted by many textbooks used in schools, hence, making learners believe that there are certain jobs that females and males can do, respectively (Sunderland, 2000). This could influence the learners' motivation and their perception towards learning.

Male students, for instance, given the chance and opportunity, tend to avoid learning languages, and are more keen on subjects like Mathematics or Science as they feel these subjects are more relevant if they are to be businessmen, surgeons or engineers (Sunderland, 2000; Govindasamy and David, 2004, as cited in Norton and Pavlenko, 2004). Female students, on the other hand, embark into 'caring' professions such as teachers, nurses or secretaries. Thus, they view their language classes as vital as

language and communication skills are needed in these professions (Sunderland, 2000; Rúa, 2006).

In addition, studies have provided evidence that females are better at learning languages as compared to males (Powell, 1979, as cited in Rúa, 2006). According to Cameron (2007), females are more verbally skilled than men. Other studies have also shown that teachers tend to pay more attention to males in the classrooms (Swann and Graddol, 1995; Sunderland, 2000). What could be the reasons for this situation? Is it due to the fact that females are better language learners, hence, they need less attention compared to males?

It is clear therefore, that motivation is an important influencing factor in language learning. Identifying the level of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability in university students and the factors that affect these components of motivation will definitely help educators, students and policy makers in enhancing language learning.

1.3. Objectives of the study

Hence, the aims of the study are to analyse the role of motivation in the learning of English as a second language and to determine the motivation components (in terms of integrative, instrumental, effort, valence, expectancy and ability) demonstrated by university students. The specific objectives of this study are to determine:

1. how do selected components of motivation (e.g. integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability) rank among university students in learning English as a second language
2. the factors that affect these selected components of motivation in learning English as a second language
3. the degree of motivation of female and male university students in learning English as a second language.

1.4. Research questions

To achieve the objectives above, these research questions have been formulated:

1. How do selected components of motivation (integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability) rank among university students in learning English as a second language?
2. What are the factors that affect their integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability in learning English as a second language?
3. How do female and male students differ in their degree of motivation in learning English as a second language?

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is significant in terms of the contributions it would make towards the enhancement of the teaching of English at the university level in Malaysia. The contributions from the findings of the study includes:

1. It will provide a better understanding of the role of motivation in developing ESL proficiency. The study will provide the language instructors with different perspectives of motivation, which would help them in designing a more effective curriculum and planning of lessons and language learning tasks and activities that are motivating for students. The understanding and awareness will better cater them in their teaching in the sense that they can encourage students to maximise their effort in what ways are best of them when learning, and using the language in the academic or the social setting.
2. English language instructors may address the gender and motivation link in the classroom by encouraging equal opportunities for females and males to interact, participate and communicate in the classroom (especially in learning a language, where practise is paramount).

1.6. Limitations of the study

Below are the limitations of this study:

- a. The participants are randomly selected from a private university college in the Klang Valley and in the second semester of the 2007 academic year who have taken at least one of the compulsory English courses offered by the university.
- b. The participants are limited to Malaysian students.

- c. The tool for data collection is a questionnaire with Likert-type scale. Thus, this study is limited to quantitative analysis only.
- d. The researcher is only looking at selected motivation components based on the Motivation Scale (developed by Wen, 1997 and adapted by Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000).

1.7. Data Collection

The researcher will administer the Motivation Scale (developed by Wen, 1997 and adapted by Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) questionnaire to a group of 189 students at a local private university college.

1.8. Data Analysis

The analysis was carried out quantitatively. The data was analysed using Microsoft Excel for Mac and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0 for Windows.

1.9. Organisation of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study with its objectives, research questions, significance, limitations and a general overview on motivation. Chapter Two will discuss the literature that has been reviewed in the course of putting this study together with a discussion of various approaches to and models of motivation. Past studies pertaining to motivation can also be found in this chapter. Chapter Three will discuss the methodology of the study with a detailed

description of the sampling, the procedures of data collection and the data analysis. Next, in Chapter Four, the findings of the study based on the research questions will be discussed. Chapter Four will also provide a comparison of results between this study and other previous studies on motivation and gender. Finally, Chapter Five summarises the whole study as well as provides some recommendations for future studies.

1.10. Summary

This chapter has given various definitions of motivation and has discussed the status of English in the education system in Malaysia. This chapter has also discussed the role of gender in the ESL classroom. In addition, this chapter has provided a general overview of the six motivation components based on the Motivation Scale (developed by Wen, 1997 and adapted by Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000) that the study aims to focus on, together with the significance and the limitations of the study.

To sum up, the study specifically intends to look at:

1. how do selected components of motivation (integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, effort, valence, expectancy and ability) rank among university students in learning English as a second language
2. the factors that affect these selected components of motivation in learning English as a second language
3. the degree of motivation of female and male university students in learning English as a second language.